The role of United Nations’ peace operations in Afghanistan’s conflict dynamics

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I hereby declare that I have compiled the paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors has been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations has been involved in Afghanistan’s conflicts since the 1980s. It has been aiming at providing for some substantial mediation aid of communication between the warring parties and supporting the state building process. Since the conditions in Afghanistan are remaining to be insecure and vulnerable, the discussion on how to efficiently reach peace should not be forgotten or silenced. This thesis aims to contribute to the debate by identifying the UN’s strategies in different phases of the wars and evaluate their consequences in the context of the state building. Explicitly, the objective is to denote the reasons why the UN has been rather ineffective in delivering methods for enduring peace in the country through normative discourse analysis. According to the study results, the UN has floundered in recognising the overall circumstances in the country throughout the different phases. Moreover, it appears that the organisation has neglected the importance of preventive diplomacy towards the insurgency. However, taking into consideration the complexity of the conflicts, one cannot argue that these are the only reasons for the prolonged operations in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, United Nations, Conflict, Peace operation, State building
INTRODUCTION

In December 1979, the troops of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (the USSR or Soviet Union) invaded Afghanistan in order to support the People’s Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) government against the Jihadist military group called ‘Mujahideen’ (Roberts 2003, 208). Opposing that, the United States of America (the USA) declared to give their support to the insurgents, which directed the path of the conflict towards a battle between the superpowers. The United Nations (UN) initiated their peace-making process on 14 January 1980 when the first resolution of ‘Situation in Afghanistan’ was agreed upon (Resolution ES-6/2 1980, 1). Even though the UN, other international organisations and the national governments have actively cooperated in order to halt the conflict, build stability and reach cohesion in the country, the Afghans have endured wars in inhumane conditions for four decades already.

The current UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, reported in February 2019 that the peace negotiations between the USA and the Taliban insurgents were moving forward since December 2018 (2019, 1). Likewise, he recognised positive progress in the Afghan government’s intentions for establishing an intra-Afghan peace dialogue (ibid.). However, another report concurrently published by the United Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) announced that in 2018 the number of civilians killed reached its peak of the years that the records have been conducted (‘Afghanistan Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict’ 2019, 1). This notice raises concerns on how the cooperation should deepen among international actors to efficiently deliver the humanitarian, military and mediation aid that is fiercely needed in Afghanistan. Since the UN has been involved in the battlefield of Afghanistan for nearly four decades, the holistic role of the organisation’s peace operations in Afghanistan should be examined.
Therefore, the thesis concentrates on the UN’s political history involvements in Afghanistan since 1980. It indicates the influence of the UN’s operations in different waves of the conflicts in Afghanistan. Based on the research, the paper aims to claim that the **UN’s shortcomings in approaching Afghanistan related issues can be explained by disconnections of their activities in different political history phases.**

The discussion is designed to be built based on the following two research questions. Firstly, the precondition is to examine a question (1) ‘**How has the UN been involved in different waves of conflicts in Afghanistan?**’. Once the reactions have been presented, the paper proceeds to seek a response to the second research question of (2) ‘**What have been the consequences of the UN’s involvement in Afghanistan’s state building?**’.

The methodology used to seek answers for the above-mentioned research questions is qualitative in its nature. Namely, the paper is based on a narrative literature review. To draw a precise image of the UN’s peace-making methods used, the resolutions, statements and academic articles are overviewed. In order to deliver valid and objective analysis throughout the thesis, the data is collected from multiple different sources. To support the decision of using the method of literature review, Baumeister and Leary identify this method to be effective when the purpose is to identify problems, weaknesses, contradictions or controversies (1997, 132). That is to say, the aim of the thesis is to indicate the potential shortcomings and their roots of the UN’s operations in Afghanistan.

The paper aims to build a base for two research variables which arise from the research questions and then succeed to merge these questions together in the discussion part. Therefore, the first chapter presents the definitions of the UN’s main peace operations activities and the historical framework of the UN’s involvement. The chapter presents the main aspects of the conflict history of Afghanistan while introducing the UN’s reactions to the different phases of the wars, and hence responding to the first research question. The thesis then proceeds on to the second research questions by analysing the influence of these operations in chapter two. When the operations of the UN and their impacts have been introduced, the discussion part takes place in chapter three. It aims to indicate that the roots of the deficiency in the UN’s actions are originated from the disconnections of operations in the history of Afghanistan’s conflicts. The main results of the analysis will then be briefly summarised in the conclusive remarks.
1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE UN’S INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

In order to maintain clarity for the most frequently used notions in the thesis, the purpose of the first subchapter is to provide definitions and compare the meaning of them in a concise manner. There are two frequently cited reports, the ‘Brahimi Report’ and the ‘Agenda for Peace’, which define the concepts of preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. These notions are presented in the first part of this chapter. The second part of the chapter then concentrates on the first research question by describing the historical progress of the UN’s operations in Afghanistan’s conflicts. It proceeds in three different sections indicating the decades and different phases of the war in Afghanistan: The Soviet Union’s occupation in Afghanistan, the civil wars, and the USA war in Afghanistan in the 2000s and 2010s.

1.1. Definitions of Peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and preventive diplomacy

The primary document offering the fundamental definitions for the concepts of peacemaking, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and preventive diplomacy was compiled by the former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in the document called ‘An Agenda for Peace’ (1992). Reflecting the same concepts, The Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, also known as the ‘Brahimi Report’ (2000) went further on by elaborating the definitions to be more concise. These two reports are examined here to illustrate the definitions and their distinctive features.

The notion, peacemaking, is introduced in the document of An Agenda for Peace as a process where peaceful means are utilized to find an agreement between the parties in conflict (1992, 5). These peaceful methods signify “negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation, settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice.” (‘Article 33 of the Charter of the United Nations’, 1945). The Brahimi Report summarises the concept of
peacemaking as an operation to end the conflict through diplomatic and meditative methods, led by peacemakers (2000, 18). Even though both definitions are still rather vague, it is worth to note that the acts are not necessarily run by the military or police personnel. Hence, one could argue this concept is essential and relative in the ongoing conflict of Afghanistan from the perspective of UN-associated peacemakers such as the current Secretary General’s Special Representative Tadamichi Yamamoto.

An Agenda for Peace explains the term of peacekeeping as a situation where UN’s military and/or police personnel are operationally holding a position to prevent conflicts, but also to make peace (1992, 5). In the Brahimi report, the notion of peacekeeping is described to been evolved from traditional ceasefire supervision to more complex pattern combining peacebuilding methods in the aftermaths of war (2000, 2). When it comes to the conflict in Afghanistan, the peacekeeping operations shall be examined in the pre-peace enforcement situation together with the peacemaking operations.

The term peacebuilding is distinct from peacemaking as it denotes rather an activity that is relevant for post-conflict conditions. Peacebuilding concentrates on bolstering that kind of post-conflict structures that are sustaining the peace (Boutros-Ghali 1992, 15). In more detail, peacebuilding includes actions such as reintegrating the soldiers into the society, enhancing the rule of law, democratic development, and human rights as well as fighting against corruption and infectious diseases (‘the Brahimi report’ 2000, 3). As Afghanistan is recovering from previous wars while still being in a conflict, there shall be peacebuilding methods used together with peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts.

According to An Agenda for Peace, the preventive diplomacy refers to the operations that firstly help to avoid frictions from arising between different parties, and then prevent occurring disagreements from escalating further on (1992, 5). More concisely, the Brahimi report describes it as a low-profile activity that aims to identify the sources of the conflict (2000, 18). Therefore, this notion is relevant in analysing how the UN has managed to identify the sources of the Afghan conflict.

After presenting the definitions of the main terms, it is evident that all of them are relevant in the context of this thesis. They all are strongly interrelated and therefore the terms may sometimes be confused with each other. Especially peacekeeping can be dependent on either peacemaking or
peacebuilding in order to gain successful result, sustainable peace. To summarise the difference between the terms, the notion of peacebuilding is mostly standing out when comparing to other concepts in question, as it concentrates on the circumstances after war.

1.2. The Historical context of the UN’s actions in Afghanistan

In order to indicate the UN’s most frequently used methods in the peace operations in Afghanistan, this subchapter aims to chronologically examine the UN’s reactions throughout the history of the conflict. The chapter is divided into three sections denoting the different phases of warfare since the UN’s active involvement. The first part of the section introduces the UN’s main frameworks, actors and essential events in the 1980s when the Soviet Union was still strongly present in Afghanistan. The second part then focuses on how the actions of the UN changed since the Soviet Union withdrew and the conflict dynamics shifted. Subsequently, the third part turns attention to the UN’s involvement in the XXI century and to the events after the 9/11 attacks.

1.2.1. The UN involvement in Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989)

As it was briefly mentioned in the introduction, UN took action in 1980 when the first resolution (Resolution ES-6/2) was published by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) as a response to the arisen concerns of the circumstances in Afghanistan. Prior to this resolution, there was a try from the Security Council to condemn Soviet Troops’ actions in the Afghan soil, which eventually failed due to the Soviet Union’s right to use VETO. However, throughout the 1980’s General Assembly diligently passed resolutions on defining the security matters in Afghanistan. These resolutions, entitled as ‘The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security’, in general condemned the interventions carried out by the foreign troops, pledging them to withdraw and respect the sovereignty and political independence of Afghanistan (Resolutions ES-6/2 1980, 2; 35/37 1980, 17; 36/34 1981, 18; 37/37 1982, 25; 38/29 1983, 24; 39/13 1984, 23; 40/12 1985, 21; 41/33 1986, 24). In addition, these resolutions called for humanitarian assistance from not only the UN member states but also from relevant UN bodies (ibid.).

What is more, the resolution published in November 1980 proposed that the Secretary-General would seek for assistance in the issues related to peacemaking and peacekeeping operations (Resolution 35/37 1980, 17). Thereinafter, the then serving UN Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, appointed Javier Pérez de Cuéllar as his Special Representative to Afghanistan.
However, a year later, Cuéllar was successful enough to be nominated to be the next UN Secretary-General and, therefore, the position for Special Representative was open again. This role was given to Diego Cordovez in 1982, who served six years as a peacemaker in Afghanistan. Arguably, his efforts provoked the first crucial directions for the UN’s peace operation strategies in the country.

The new Special Representative had to adapt to the changing nature of the conflict since the already intense Afghan-Pakistan relations became even more strained due to Pakistan’s refusal to support the PDPA government. In addition, the PDPA government’s president Babrak Karmal was replaced with Najib (who later became known under his real name, Najibullah Ahmadzai or Mohammad Najibullah) in 1987 (Barfield 2010, 238). Cordovez actively intended to gather the disputing parties around the same negotiation table, which ultimately resulted as the Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Related to Afghanistan.

The Agreements also known as the Geneva Accords were signed between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The USA and the Soviet Union were the guarantors of them. There were four major components agreed on. Firstly, Afghanistan and Pakistan decided to respect each other’s sovereignty based on the terms of the agreement on non-interference and non-intervention (‘Agreements on the Settlement of the Situation Related to Afghanistan’ 1988, 3). The second part included guidelines on the voluntary returns of Afghan refugees in Pakistan (ibid., 7). Thirdly, the Geneva Accords obligated the Soviet troops to withdraw from the Afghan territory within the nine months since the date of the agreement’s entry into force (ibid., 11). Lastly, the agreements stated that the international guarantee of the Accords exists (ibid., 11). To facilitate and to monitor the adaptation of the Geneva Accords, the UN Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan (UNGOMAP) was established in May 1988 to operate until 1990. However, Diego Cordovez’ peacemaking intentions in Afghanistan ended on his resignation in 1988. He was then replaced by Benon Sevan, which initiated a new, second phase, of the UN’s peace operation strategies.


The UNGOMAP was succeeded by the Office of the Secretary-General in Afghanistan and Pakistan (OSGAP) on 15 March 1990. It held the position as a peacemaking body for three years and was forced to adapt to the concurrent changes in world politics. Based on the General Assembly resolution’s call for the Secretary-General to “encourage and facilitate the early
realization of a comprehensive political settlement in Afghanistan in accordance with the provisions of the Geneva Agreements” (Resolution 44/15 1989, 25), Pérez De Cuéllar addressed new methods for peacemaking through ‘international consensus’ (Ewans 2002, 179). This meant that the international actors should have come up with an agreement on how to proceed to peaceful results in Afghanistan. However, the Soviet withdrawal intensified the Afghan civil war and decreased also the USA’s interests to stay involved in Afghanistan. Concurrently Afghanistan became a ground to solve regional issues of countries such as Pakistan, Iran, India, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (Saikal 1996, 21). These factors pushed forward OSGAP’s intentions to transfer the power through establishing an interim government (Fielden, M. & Goodhand, J. 2001, 18) in order to relieve the tensions within the nation. The interim government was then established among the Mujahideen leaders in 1992, and Najibullah’s government was dismantled (Barfield 2010, 171).

According to the General Assembly’s resolution 47/119, the establishment of the interim government of the Islamic State in Afghanistan was seen as a positive change to the situation in Afghanistan (1992). One could argue that there was a shift from the earlier resolutions promoting peacemaking methods to the latter one, starting to concentrate more on peacebuilding mechanisms. Namely, these could be seen as the reconstruction and stabilization of Afghanistan (Resolution 47/119, 1992).

Furthermore, the OSGAP was replaced by UN Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMA) in 1993. The aim of this new body was to monitor these peacebuilding operations. Since the establishment of UNSMA, its leaders were struggling to find peacebuilding solutions in Afghanistan. The first leader of the new body, Mahmoud Mestiri, held his position from 1994 to 1996 (Rubin 2013, 45). His plan was to transmit the power from the interim government to electorally legitimated government (Saikal 1996, 23). After his resignation, the new Special Envoy was to be Norbert Heinrich Holl. However, he served in his position for only one year and was then replaced by Lakhdar Brahimi in 1997.

Couple months after Mestiri started as a leader of the Special Mission to Afghanistan, the Pakistani supported forces of Taliban began to take over the territory of Afghanistan (Fielden, M & Goodhand, J. 2001, 9). By 1996, the Taliban had gained control over the majority of the territory of Afghanistan and the capital of the Kabul with Pakistan’s support (Barfield 2010, 171). The
president Rabbani sought for support from the United Islamic Front for the Salvation of Afghanistan, which was opposing the emergence of the Taliban.

Therefore, when Brahimi took over as a new Special Envoy to Afghanistan, the nature of the crisis had already changed once again due to the deepening fragmentation of Afghani people. Accordingly, the objectives of the UN’s resolutions shifted back to address peacemaking methods instead of peacebuilding approach. The Security Council published a resolution 1076 emphasising non-interference, demanding to cease the arms trade, promoting peace negotiations and denouncing the violations of human rights, especially the discrimination of girls and women (1996, 2-3).

During the Brahimi’s era in the position of the Special Envoy to Afghanistan, there were essential peacemaking intentions introduced. Firstly, he managed to organise a framework, known as ‘Six plus Two’, for seeking peaceful solutions in Afghanistan together with the countries of Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, China, as well as the Russian Federation and the USA. Secondly, as it is mentioned in the Brahimi report, the UN managed to mediate the deteriorated relations of Iran and Afghanistan in 1998 (2000, 3) and thus, avoid the war between them. The reason for crumbling relations can be identified to be, to some extent, the attacks that Taliban made in Mazar-i-Sharif and Jalalabad, killing UN’s staff and capturing Iranian diplomats, including the Consulate-General of Iran. The UN Security Council’s resolution 1193 condemned these attacks and demanded the Taliban to investigate them (1998, 3).

What is more, by the end of 1999 the western world, especially the USA, had completely turned against the Taliban due to international terrorism. Osama Bin Laden had influenced the Taliban troops in Afghanistan, and together they planned attacks against the USA’s embassies. Thus, the resolution 1267 demanded the Taliban to end its support of Osama Bin Laden and imposed international sanctions such as to freeze funds of the Taliban (1999, 2). The resolution called forth all the states to agree with the common policy against the terrorism of the Taliban (ibid.).

1.2.3. The UN involvement in the USA-led War in Afghanistan (2001-)

As the predominant conflict changes in the late 1990s created a fragmentation between the western world and the Taliban, one could assume that the XXI century did not start with optimistic views of gaining sustainable peace in Afghanistan. Soon after the change of the century, a new wave in
Afghan wars was determined by the attacks of 9/11 in the USA. This wave in politics shaped the third generation of the UN’s strategies in Afghanistan.

There were two essential documents released in 2000 and 2001 denoting the UN’s peace operations and human security: the Brahimi Report and the Bonn Agreement. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Brahimi Report’s intention was to renew the frameworks for the UN’s peace operations. Moreover, the ‘Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions’, known as the ‘Bonn Agreement’, was published in December 2001. It was again based on Brahimi’s contribution to the UN’s peace operations. In his Briefing to the UN Security Council, he presented five points to approach the challenges in Afghanistan (Brahimi 2001). At that time, the context was already trembled by the September 11 attacks and the USA’s declaration of the War on Terror known as Operation Enduring Freedom. Taking shape from these events, the Bonn Agreement declared that there shall be established an Interim Government for six months. During that time, the Emergency Loya Jirga (national council) should be held to decide the Transitional Authority, and ultimately free elections determining the broad-based government (‘Bonn Agreement’ 2001, 3-4). In addition, it authorized the Constitutional Loya Jirga to take place after 18 months of the creation of the Transitional Authority in order to obtain a new constitution in Afghanistan (ibid.). The head of the interim government was chosen to be Hamid Karzai, who led the country until 2014.

The Bonn Agreement created a base for two new instruments to assist and survey the conditions for establishing the transit government for Afghanistan. Firstly, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was authorized on the Security Council’s resolution 1386 to provide security in the country (2001, 1). The United Kingdom took responsibility for organising the mission, and it was led by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The second initiative stemming from the Bonn Agreement was stated in the Security Council’s resolution 1401 (2002, 2). It replaced the UNSMA by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). The mandate of UNAMA has been renewed since then until the present day. The Security Council took further steps to define the peacemaking methods in Afghanistan through renewing the UNAMA’s acts in 2008 (‘Resolution 1806’ 2008, 3). The specific points being summarised, the role of the UNAMA was to cooperate with the ISAF, coordinate the international assistance, support the Afghan Government and regional cooperation, and contribute to the efforts of building a state with rule of law and respect to human rights (ibid.).
Brahimi held the position of a Special Representative to Afghanistan until 2004. During his last years in the office, the Interim Government was established, and the neighbouring countries recognised it in the Good-Neighbourly Relations Declaration (2002, 1-2). The countries signing the so-called Kabul Declaration were China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

There were several International Conferences on Afghanistan organised during the 2000s. In 2006, A London Conference on Afghanistan produced an agreement known as Afghanistan Compact. The Compact specified the measures to be taken to improve the security, governance, rule of law, human rights and the economic and social development (‘The Afghanistan Compact’ 2006, 2). It was a mutual agreement made between the international community and the Government of Afghanistan. International Conferences on Afghanistan have been continued to be organised by the UN during the 2010s. Namely, they have been held in London, Kabul, Bonn, Tokyo and in Geneva. The latest Conference was the one in Geneva in November 2018.

The USA-led Operation Enduring Freedom continued over the change of the decade in Afghanistan. The situation was still fragile, and the UN continued its intention to function as a mediator by creating more initiatives and operations to deliver methods which would ultimately result as a sustainable peace. Namely, one of these efforts was the creation of The Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) in 2010. The APRP was receiving support from UNAMA and the Afghan government to promote mechanisms to finally gain peace in Afghanistan. The APRP aimed to reach its goal through three different approaches. A consultant to the APRP has summarised these intentions followingly: “(1) to strengthen security and government institutions for promoting peace and reintegration; (2) to facilitate the political conditions for establishing peace; (3) to enhance national, regional and international support for fostering peace and stability” (Quie 2018, 24). The programme lasted until 2016.
2. THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE UN’S INVOLVEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

This chapter aims to evaluate the major consequences of the historical involvement of the UN which was presented in the previous chapter. The structure of the chapter is divided into the equivalent phases of Afghanistan’s conflict. The first section concentrates on the Cordovez’ era of Special Representative and the impact of mediating between the USA and the USSR as well as the neighbouring countries of Afghanistan and the Najibullah government. The paper then proceeds to the second section, finding the consequences of the UN’s actions during the Civil Wars in Afghanistan. The last part then concentrates on the impact of Brahimi’s work and the conferences held in the 2000s under the circumstances of the USA-led War in Afghanistan.

2.1. The Impacts of Cordovez’ Diplomacy

The UN drew the global attention towards Afghanistan since publishing the first Resolution ES-6/2 by requesting for help from the international community as well as the UN bodies. Furthermore, appointing a Special Representative to Afghanistan facilitated the General Assembly’s and the Secretary General’s abilities to concentrate on the peacemaking that was stressed in the resolutions published in early the 1980s.

Therefore, Diego Cordovez could be greeted for succeeding to solve the disputes between the Najibullah government and Pakistan in Geneva Accords. Alongside the success, this was a determining circumstance for creating pressure for the Soviet troops to withdraw from Afghanistan, but also an essential point for the other international actors to re-evaluate the influence of their involvement in the country’s peace and conflict dynamics. As a consequence, the USA and the USSR agreed in the Geneva Accords that they would both cease their support for the warring parties of PDPA government and Mujahideen in Afghanistan. Even though the creation of UNGOMAP was supposed to facilitate the monitoring of the implementation of the Geneva agreements, the support of the USA and the USSR did not cease before 1992 (Lansford 2017, 173). What is more, it has been criticized for not being actually able to bring change in any other way than diplomatically covering the Soviet withdrawal from the Soviet Union (Rubin 2013, 40).
Yet, another important note should be addressed on the aftereffect of the matter that Mujahideen insurgents were not involved in the Geneva negotiations and therefore the agreements made were not concerning them. As the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan and substantially decreased the leverage of the Najibullah government, the troops of Mujahideen were able to gain more power. Pakistan initially opposed the withdrawal of the Soviet troops as it foresaw that it would only intensify the conflict among the Afghans (Saikal 1996, 27). These concerns resulted to be accurate when the Mujahideen aggressively confronted the Najibullah’s regime in Jalalabad in 1989 (Ewans 2002, 177). The Geneva Accords, Soviet Union’s withdrawal and the existence of aggressive, opposing parties in Afghanistan created a vital ground for intensified conflict.

### 2.2. The Phase of a Strategic Vacuum

As the change in conflict dynamics occurred and Cordovez left the office without reaching the peace in Afghanistan, it was now Benon Sevan’s and OSGAP’s responsibility to mediate the rigorous relations between the Mujahideen and Najibullah’s supporters. The consequence of Sevan’s interpretation of the situation was that he started to approve features of the Najibullah’s regime and concurrently ignored the alarming matter, that the group of Mujahideen was becoming increasingly sceptical of the UN’s involvement in Afghanistan (Saikal 1996, 28). This resulted as decreasing leverage of the UN in the policies of the Mujahideen.

When it comes to the OSGAP’s role, it continued the work of the UNGOMAP in surveillance of the implementation of the Geneva Accords. During the time of Sevan and the OSGAP, there were intentions to establish free and fair elections, and thus independence and self-determination for Afghanistan (Ewans 2002, 180). However, little impact was delivered as the Mujahideen’s interim government found it difficult to agree with these aims since they already lacked confidence in the UN’s actions originating from the experience that they had obtained from the Geneva Accords (ibid.).

The circumstances changed when Najibullah resigned, and the era of the communist regime was over in Afghanistan. Sevan’s and the OSGAP’s goal of establishing a government through free elections failed, but the UN-brokered Peshawar Accords had created an interim government of the Mujahideen regime, which now became the ruling power in Afghanistan. The Islamic State of Afghanistan was established. As reflected before, through the resolution 47/119, at this time the
sentiments related to peacebuilding and stabilization of the country were optimistic. The UN decreased its involvement in Afghanistan, and from 1992 to 1994 there were no UN-led peace negotiations held, and the situation reminded of a strategic vacuum (Rubin 2013, 29). This gave increasing opportunities for the neighbouring countries to start acting according to their interests in the country. In particular, Pakistan saw its opportunity to increase its support to the insurgents of the Taliban (ibid.).

The creation of the UNSMA in 1993 was trying to adapt to the current political situation in Afghanistan. Before the establishment, the UN already lacked authority towards Mujahideen (Saikal 1996, 30), but also the strategies on how to politically proceed were unclear (Rubin 2013, 40). While the UN was contemplating the future strategies in Afghanistan, the troops of the Taliban captured Kabul. The Special Representative of that time, Mahmoud Mestiri and the body of UNSMA were not able to deliver effective solutions to the emerged change of the political landscape. Moreover, the regional powers of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates eventually recognised the diplomatic relations with the Taliban (Barfield 2010, 264).

More consequences can be detected since the appointment of Lakhdar Brahimi to the position of the Special Representative. Firstly, as discussed in the previous chapter, he succeeded to get the six regional powers to discuss with each other about the concerning matters of Afghanistan, with the support of the USA and Russia. However, even though the resolutions were pledging to cease the arms trade and end the interference of external powers, they did not manage to stop Pakistan’s support to Taliban, let alone bring Taliban representatives around the same negotiation table (Afsah & Guhr 2005, 402). In addition, the relations between Iran and the Taliban’s government deteriorated due to the murder of Iranian consular in Mazar-i-Sharif (Barfield 2010, 265). Subsequently, Brahimi took preventive diplomatic actions by mediating the deteriorated relations of Iran and Afghanistan in 1998 and the war between them was avoided. Even though the resolutions demanded an investigation of the Taliban’s provoking terrorist attacks towards Iran, the Taliban ultimately neglected that they would have any interests to sabotage Iranian politics (ibid.). Once again, the UN appeared with lack of authority towards the insurgency which was now the role of the Taliban.
2.3. The Efforts of Democratic Transition

When Brahimi returned to the position as a Special Representative to Afghanistan, the western confrontation towards Osama bin Laden and the Taliban was already intensified. After the September 11 attacks, and the USA’s declaration of War on Terror, Brahimi’s diplomatic abilities were once again tested. He managed to create foundations for the Bonn Agreements, where the future of Afghanistan’s government was decided on. However, it is important to note that the Taliban was not participating in the conference and thus the Bonn conference cannot be perceived as a peace negotiation. The USA was concurrently taking responsibility in the counterinsurgency methods and hence trying to diminish the existence of the Taliban regime.

The Loya Jirgas, constitution, and the elections took place as it was decided in the Bonn conference. The election of the Karzai as the president of the country was controversial. He was respected for his decency as a leader and for the criticism that he possessed towards the Taliban (Maley 2006, 34). However, he did not have abilities to rule the country in order to develop the governance, security or the economy to a stage where it could be self-reliant (Jalali 2008, 41). In addition, the difficulty to create a self-reliant government with a rule of law could be argued to be originated from the dependence on international assistance (Suhkre et al. 2004, vi).

The Bonn Agreement created a mandate for the peacekeeping operations, that is to say, the operation ISAF, which lasted until 2014. The operation carried out by NATO, provided support and assistance for the Afghan military as well as surveyed the process of establishing a rule of law in a peaceful manner. It also supported the fighting against the insurgency, drug trafficking, and corruption. The goals of the mission were not achieved by the end of 2014, and the mission was replaced with a new one called the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, which is still active.

In addition, Bonn Agreements can be seen as a place of origin for the peacemaking and peacebuilding operation of UNAMA. The UNAMA was established to survey the implementation of the Bonn Agreements and investigating the human rights violations in Afghanistan. It acted according to a so-called light-footprint approach, meaning that it would give the Afghan authorities the space to direct the process of transition in their own way (Hasegawa 2008, 217). However, the responsibilities of this body were not delivered in an efficient manner. In the initial stages of UNAMA’s actions, the security vacuum in Afghanistan created challenges for the body, and therefore, it managed to only moderately to meet its goals in its performance (ibid.). UNAMA still
continues to support and assist the state-building, mediation and development with its goal to help Afghanistan to become a stable state which respects human rights. It pressured Karzai’s government to take more responsibility in order to obtain a highly centralised government (Barfield 2010, 303).

The International Conferences have also had an influence on the situation in Afghanistan. When the London Conference was held in 2006, the Taliban had increased its attacks once again and the government was criticised for its corruption and ineffectiveness among other concerning matters (Rubin & Hamidzada 2007, 9). Therefore, the Afghan Compact aimed to specify the necessary measures to be taken to reach stable governance, rule of law, security, economic development and respect for human rights. The same aspirations have been renewed and updated in the International Conferences brokered by the UN throughout the 2000s and 2010s. The latest Conference, the Geneva Conference, continued to focus on the aims set in Bonn of a “Transformation Decade”, meaning that with the aid and assistance of the international community, Afghanistan would be self-reliant by 2024 (‘Geneva Conference on Afghanistan’ 2019).
3. DISCUSSION ON THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE UN’S INVOLVEMENT

As the previous chapters have aimed to indicate, there are some disconnections among the UN’s involvement in resolving the situation in Afghanistan. Three different generations of strategies and actions are identified, and their consequences are examined. Based on this research the involvement of the UN in Afghanistan has included ambitious operations and missions, but they have continuously stumbled to reach their objectives, let alone to arrive at the eventual goal of enduring peace and stable governance in Afghanistan. One of the reasons for this could be identified to originate from the incapability to learn from the earlier phase’s mistakes. This chapter aims to evaluate the overwhelming shortcomings in the context of these three phases.

Generally speaking, the resolutions are introduced in previous chapters in order to demonstrate the strategic aspirations of the UN. The most successful feature of them could be described to be the creation of the foundations for peacemaking methods such as international negotiations or conferences. However, the detailed aspirations of the resolutions have proved to be rather ineffective when it comes to implementing them in practice. As the UN personnel and peacemakers have struggled to draw a precise image of the predominant circumstances, it has been challenging to allocate the resources efficiently.

The initial step of the UN’s involvement takes back to the period of time when the Soviet Union occupied Afghanistan. This could be identified as the first phase of the UN’s involvement strategy in the conflict. The Special Envoy Diego Cordovez was one of the first UN personnel that stood in an essential position to determine the directions of the UN’s path of involvement in the country. Two major points of his approach shall be pointed out. Firstly, the stand that Cordovez took, was concentrating on the external actors’ relations and interests in Afghanistan rather than intra-afghan negotiations. This action is opposing the definition of peacemaking as it is not taking into consideration all the parties in conflict. Undeniably, Cordovez managed to mediate the relations of the external parties in Afghanistan. However, this action led to the UN losing connection and authority to the Mujahideen insurgents. In fact, Amin Saikal argues that Cordovez intentionally
gathered only a few actors to the peace negotiations, as the initial goal was to mediate the relations between the USA and the USSR (1996, 25). However, this caused a rather sceptical interpretation of the insurgents considering the role of the UN in Afghanistan rather, and it has been transmitted to the later phases of conflicts and UN involvement. Secondly, the actions taken by the UN were ignoring the possibility of having a power vacuum after the Soviet withdrawal. That is to say, there were ineffective preventive measures carried out by the organisation to avoid the civil war within the already fragmented nation.

The second phase of the UN’s involvement could be identified to start from the time when Benon Sevan took the responsibility of being the Special Representative to Afghanistan. Again, the disconnection of the UN involvements here lays in several matters. To start with, when Sevan inaugurated to the position, he failed to take into consideration the already deteriorated relations with Mujahideen and rather improved the connections with the authorities of soon dismantled Najibullah government (Saikal 1996, 25). What is more, even though Sevan aspired to establish a broad-based transition government, there was no practical strategy since the holistic interpretation of the conflict was complex. Little interest in the Afghan situation was actually delivered by the UN when the Mujahideen leaders took control of the state. In addition, after the Taliban gained majority control of Afghanistan in 1996, the UN struggled to gain authority over them. Therefore, this phase could be described to be an era of stagnation in the UN’s involvement. What is more, it could be questioned whether the UN shifted from the peacemaking to peacebuilding too early, as the civil war was still continuing in 1992.

It could be argued that the UN changed the direction of peacemaking the most when Lakhdar Brahimi was reappointed as the Special Representative in 2001. In this context, this is classified as the third phase of the UN’s involvement. Quickly after the September 11 attacks, Brahimi pushed forward the guidelines for the actions that were then determined in the Bonn Conference. Consequently, the agreements made in Bonn created the framework for the UN operations for the beginning of the XXI century. Brahimi identified that one of the lessons learned from the UN’s involvement from the past should be that one should not underestimate others nor overestimate oneself (Brahimi 2016, 27). In addition, the organisation shall pay more attention to the matter that the resources are used in the most efficient way possible, with the use of a light footprint in Afghanistan (ibid.). Even though the third phase of the UN’s involvement has eased the formation of the government and constitution, it still has not obtained the monopoly of force and the
The insurgency of the Taliban has not disappeared. The following Table 1 summarises the classification of the major shortcomings of the three strategic phases.

Table 1. Classification of the consequences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Shortcoming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of Diego Cordovez as a Special</td>
<td>Centralised peacemaking only between the external actors in Afghanistan, and therefore no attention to preventive diplomacy directed towards Mujahideen insurgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Geneva Accords</td>
<td>Mujahideen’s exclusion created scepticism towards the UN’s actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The surveillance of the Geneva Accords by the UNGOMAP</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of Benon Sevan as a Special</td>
<td>The lack of holistic interpretation of the circumstances led to the strategic vacuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of the OSGAP</td>
<td>The lack of holistic interpretation of the circumstances led to the strategic vacuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of the UNSMA</td>
<td>Shifting from peacemaking to peacebuilding while the civil war was ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of Mahmoud Mestiri as a Special</td>
<td>Incapable to recognise the rise of the Taliban and react to it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appointment of Lakhdar Brahimi as a Special</td>
<td>Incapable to root out the actions of the Taliban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of the UNAMA</td>
<td>Ineffective to implement all its objectives due to the security vacuum in Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author.

Two essential features can be reflected in the three phases of the UN’s involvement in Afghanistan. Firstly, as it is looming from the table, the UN has insufficiently managed their response to the insurgency since organising the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Afghanistan. During the
second phase, there were little incentives offered to the insurgents. After the September 11 attacks, the UN’s methods on managing the Taliban insurgency tended to be even more coercive which can be demonstrated through the need for establishing the ISAF. Rubin Barnett argues that there would be increasingly political tools to manage insurgency (2013, 322). Secondly, the UN peacemakers have struggled to interpret and evaluate the circumstances in Afghanistan throughout the centuries. Explicitly, the documents produced to determine the strategies have barely taken into account the diverse range of Afghan values and traditions. They have been formed by relying on western values and understanding of good governance and anti-corruption without considering the Afghan traditions, religions or culture (Friis 2012, 295). The light footprint approach should improve the relevance of the latter concerns.
CONCLUSION

The thesis has been divided into three different sections. The first chapter presented the notions used in the context of UN peace operations. The chapter then continued to identify three different eras of the UN’s strategies of involvement in Afghanistan while presenting the major actions taken since 1980. The first phase began from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the second era is classified to be the era of the civil wars, and the last phase denoted the beginning of the XXI century and the start of the USA-led War in Afghanistan. Accordingly, the thesis proceeded to the second chapter where it has included an examination on the consequences of these certain actions in the process of building sustainable peace, security, and the stable Afghan government. Finally, the last chapter expresses the evaluation of the claim.

After all, it would also be fallacious to argue that the UN has been thoroughly unsuccessful in its peace operation roles in Afghanistan. In fact, alongside the above-mentioned shortcomings, the UN has proved to generate advancements in various manners in the country. For instance, appointing the Special Representatives and the particular UN bodies has enabled the centralised approach in peace operations. What is more, the UN has repeatedly managed to mediate the strained relations of the international actors in Afghanistan related issues. Especially, the Brahimi’s period led to several positive outcomes such as the establishment of the ‘Six plus Two’ framework and the prevention of the Iran-Afghan war in 1998.

The thesis sought to prove the claim that the UN’s shortcomings in Afghanistan related issues can be explained by the disconnections in their activities of different political history phases. Principally these disconnections are associated with the lack of preventive diplomacy directed at the insurgents and the incapability to interpret the all-encompassing conditions of the conflicts in Afghanistan. However, even though the thesis has proved that there are some disconnections and lessons that have not been learned in between different phases, this cannot be argued to be the only source of drawbacks in the organisation’s actions.
Through the study, the thesis has aimed to provide added value to the contemporary discussion of the UN’s involvement in Afghanistan. By identifying the three phases of the UN peace operations in the conflicts, the research provides a concise overview of the political-historical developments made by the organisation in the country. As they are introduced, one can notice certain patterns of actions that emerge repeatedly, but the organisation has not appeared to take initiative to learn from them. For example, the UN-brokered agreements have continuously ignored the inclusion of the insurgents. However, it shall be evaluated in further research whether or not this disregard has actually been deliberate. This thesis adheres the discussions evaluating the ways of how to get rid of the organisation’s counterproductive actions in Afghanistan.

The study suggests a few more issues for further research of the UN’s involvement, which should be examined in the same political historical context. That is to say, the first concern could evaluate whether the management of the Taliban insurgency should include more political approaches instead of using only coercion or military threats. Another considerable question for future research should weigh the extent of the UN emphasising western values when assisting in peace operations. Conducting research from these perspectives would support the development of the UN peace operation strategies in Afghanistan in order to eventually reach the enduring peace and prosperous state building.
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